THE NEW FOREST

PAINTED AND DESCRIBED BY

MRS. WILLINGHAM RAWNSLEY

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THE NEW FOREST

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BIRCHES ON THE BROCKENHURST ROAD,
NEAR NEW PARK. NOVEMBER.

THE NEW FOREST

BY

MRS. WILLINGHAM RAWNSLEY

WITH TWENTY FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR

LONDON
ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK
1904

'Moreover, since that and, as ye should know,
Bears not alone the gems for Summer's show,
Or gold and pearls for fresh, green-coated Spring,
Or rich adornment for the flickering wing
Of fleeting Autumn; but hath little fear
For the white conqueror of the fruitful year.'

WILLIAM MORRIS.

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JANUARY

The winter's snow may come and go,
And April shadows green.'

THE NEW FOREST

JANUARY

We are entering now upon the season of the year that is often called 'melancholy winter,' 'the frozen time,' the days when colour is gone from the landscape and warmth of sunshine from the air—when all Nature looks dreary, gray and dead.

The forest, indeed, lies under the hand of winter; all the pools are frozen to white sheets of ice, and on the ground, under the trees, the blackbirds and missel-thrushes sit with puffed feathers, half stupefied with cold, or rustle the dead leaves as they scratch them up with beak and claw, searching for some possible food amongst them or from the frozen ground. It is sad for these when the bogs and pools are all frozen hard, and the poor birds search vainly for water.

The chaffinches, robins, and blue-tits seem to

endure the rigorous weather with better cheer, and flit silently about amongst the bare branches, or sometimes even whistle a note of song, giving a cheerful gleam, as they fly, of orange breast or steely wing. The distant pinewoods look misty and blue through the frozen air; the nearer ones show a heavy, massed, indigo tint. The rounded outlines of far-off wintry wood have fine pencilled tracery where their edges meet the sky—the outermost tips of thousands of tiny branches—and from amongst the lower masses stand out the white stems of birches and the deepened shades of ivy-clad trunks. Nearer, the huge forest trees stretch out bare, fantastic arms, some darkened and soaked with damp, others showing out light against the soft blues and grays of the background, where they are covered with the pale, metallic green of lichen, and these traceried branches fall in long, trailing curves from the beech-trees, or in sharp angles, foreshortened as they are flung outwards, from the oaks. Some of the broad, sloping trunks are clad in soft green velvet coats of moss, and this warm, olive-tinted moss runs down also over their knotted roots, tracing channels of iridescent green through the red-russet carpet of last year's

leaves. Indeed, the accusation of dreariness can hardly be brought against the forest in winter; and still less at any other season of the year. Now, in mid-winter, there is colour to be found everywhere: of warm-tinted dry leaves and brilliant moss, vivid lichen and red bracken, and distant blue of woods. Majestic or graceful form in rugged oaks and smooth-stemmed beeches, green depths of holly, and fountain-spray of crimson birch-twigs.

Occasionally, though at rare intervals, the forest in January becomes a veritable fairyland—when a very heavy fog has been succeeded in the early hours of the morning by a sharp frost. One such morning I will attempt to describe.

There was no sunshine to speak of, so the beautiful rime did not melt; the air was bright and crisp; no snow had fallen, but on every tree and blade of grass was a thick coating of brilliant hoar-frost. The frost spicules were more than twice the ordinary size, from half to three-quarters of an inch in length, and they made the otherwise bare wood quite thick with this delicate clothing of lacelike white rime. Each tree and bush was so thickly enveloped that you could no more see through their branches than if they had been in

full leaf. But the varied forms of oak and birch, and beech and hazel, of gorse and holly, were quite distinct, and as one moved along the rides of the enclosure it was a scene of beauty which could only be called fairylike.

Suddenly, as we passed slowly along in a ceaseless ecstasy of admiration, a slight stamp was heard, and, looking in the direction of the sound, we saw just inside the hazel thicket, and not three yards from us, the magnificent, wondering eyes and the splendid branching antlers of a wild fallow buck of six or seven seasons. He looked straight at us, motionless for a short minute, from amidst the lace-like embroidery of the frosted copse-wood, his grand head alone being visible to us; and then with a quick turn he was gone, and we heard him crashing through the bushes, scattering the rime frost in clouds of white powder, and, following at leisure, we traced him by his dark line of passage through the snow-white glades till we saw where he had leapt the fence and gone up the heathery slopes to the hiding-places in the thick hollies on the crest of the opposite hill.

Soon the sun came out, and the forest sparkled with a glitter like that of myriads of diamonds, and

then the beautiful coating flaked off and fell in a tinkling shower, which lasted for an hour or two, and the trees were again their old brown selves. But the sight was one never to be forgotten, and never in a space of twenty years have I seen it displayed to such a marvellously beautiful extent or with such unusually large ice-crystals.

Again, after a heavy snowfall during the night, what a vision of wonder is spread out before us in the morning !—piles of snow heaped up along the larger horizontal branches, outlining their forms, and on the broad layers of evergreens in the garden. It is only in the morning that this thick-muffling mantle of snow can be seen, as when the warmth of the sun reaches it the least breath of wind will dislodge it, and we hear it fall with a heavy thud to the ground. But still the soft snow-sheet covers the open lawns between the trees, the round heads of which loom out dark brown and heavy purple by contrast.

A wonderful brilliancy and light is in the air, and gives a buoyant feeling of delight, such as is only experienced at such a time, while the earth is white with snow.

And in a room that is hung with old oil-paintings

this peculiar luminosity that belongs to snow will light up the dark corners of these pictures, and bring out details which are quite invisible under their dark coats of varnish at ordinary times, even under the brightest light of a summer sun. Yet it must be owned that, as a sequel to all this brilliancy and beauty of the fresh snow and hoar-frost, we have an unpleasant time to go through when this same snow is leaving us—

> 'When all unkindly with the shifting wind,
> The thaw comes on at Candlemas.'

And a dry, frosty winter, with very little snow and a fair allowance of open weather for the hunting, is what most of us desire, though to canter in a sledge over snowy roads has an exhilaration of its own, delightful while it lasts, but this can so seldom be indulged in that it can hardly be taken into consideration as even a probable pastime.

FEBRUARY

'Holly hath berries
As red as any rose,
The forester and the hunters
Keep them from the does.

'Ivy hath berries
As black as any sloe;
There come the owl
And eat him as she goe.'

Old Carol.

FEBRUARY

The lengthening days of this month, and the bright sunshine which we often have in the middle of the day, make one all the more sensitive to the sharp, frosty nights. Day after day, on rising, we see frozen crystals on the pane and icicles hanging from the porch, which drip in a melancholy way all day while the sun can melt them, and freeze again into long crystal daggers at night. The ground is covered with a thin sprinkling of snow, which also, thawed at mid-day, is frozen nightly to a layer of ice, making the roads and garden paths difficult for walking and driving.

Towards the middle or end of the month, walking along the frozen paths of the woodlands, our eye is caught by what is usually the very first sign of spring, the 'first slip of unexpected green': a tender shoot of honeysuckle, twined round the hazel-branches, and putting out its fresh green buds, or we may spy a tiny rosette of primrose leaves,

nestling deep amongst the dead leafage, and hiding its treasure of buds deep in its bosom. How slowly do these buds rise upon lengthening stems, and open out their sweet, soft, velvety blossoms!—the first of the spring flowers, and almost the last also, for they bloom through March, April, even up till the end of May, preceding and outlasting the daffodils, the wild hyacinths and wood anemones, and staying with us until the foxglove time brings in 'high summer.' Another very early flower is the 'pulmonaria,' or lungwort, whose hairy leaves spotted with white, pink buds and deep-blue flowers, come as a surprise in this wintry month, with a rare touch of colour amongst the bare brown twigs and dry leaves.

One of the greatest charms of the forest is the variety of its animal life. At all hours of the day, though most at early morning and in the evening, you may see the rabbits sitting up and playing round their sandy earths in the short heather. Hares are scarce, but stoats and weasels only too common, and until the anguished cry of the poor rabbit makes you turn to take the side of the pursued, there is no greater pleasure than to watch the graceful movements of a stoat—the very per-

A PEEP ON THE BROCKENHURST ROAD.
EARLY SPRING.

sonification of courage and activity. The playful little squirrels are constantly to be seen, singly or in pairs, and to watch their gambols and flying leaps from one tree-top or swaying branch to another adds very much to the pleasure of a forest walk or ride.

Then, you never go far through the woodlands or open spaces without at least the *chance* of seeing a fox, standing with knowing face turned over his shoulder as he watches you, or slipping quietly along through the underwood, or across a ride, on business of his own. The otter is not so easy to see, but his traces may be found on the sides of the little streams, far enough from anything that can be called a river, and where one would think that frogs must be his only fare. But the earths of that most interesting and genuine wild animal the badger are sufficiently numerous and well known.

Happy the badger who lives in the New Forest! He may be dug out and set to run over the plain in his curious trundling fashion, with little dogs yapping at his heels, but he will suffer no harm, and will live out his life, secure in his sandy retreat.

There remains the deer: he for whom, in the

first instance, the forest was made and guarded. The great stag, or red deer, whom the Red King 'loved as his own life,' would have ceased from the forest long ago but for importations from one park or another, and as they are hunted now and again each season, their numbers are kept within very strict limits, for, in the New Forest, they hunt to kill.

But, whatever may have been the case in Norman times, the characteristic sport of the New Forest now is the hunting of the wild fallow deer, a good number of which, both bucks and does, are killed annually. These fallow deer are not indigenous, like the red deer, but are of Asiatic origin. I do not suppose that they are even the descendants of any herd that have been in the forest since the earliest forest laws were made. The 'New Park' was created in Jacobean times to accommodate a herd newly imported for the King; and it is probable that more than one kind of fallow deer have fed and roamed in the forest. Those that are now there have this peculiarity, which distinguishes them from the ordinary fallow deer of English parks—namely, that instead of being either tawny and spotted, like the usual picture-book fallow deer,

or else dark on the back and light beneath, and keeping these respective colours all the year round; the New Forest deer is dark in the winter, and changes his coat to the tawny colour, with light spots, in the summer, the same animal showing both the coats at different seasons of the year.

Though there are a fair number of deer about, it is not easy to see them. They are almost invisible in the woods at a distance of 50 yards, or less if lying down, and of 100 yards if standing still, but when they move you can see them. They are usually in little groups of five to ten, bucks and does together, though sometimes, crossing the open heath, you may come upon a single deer, or a string of them in single file. Watch them now, and as they come to the low, two-railed enclosure-fence, you will see them, not bounding over as you might expect, but crawling one by one through the rails, which are always set on a low bank, with a little ditch on the outer side. Even bucks with branching horns will often do this rather than jump. The fawns, being dropped at the time when the bracken is full-grown, are visible comparatively seldom. But at all times it is when you are not looking for deer that you are most apt to

see them, and you may often hear them crashing through the thickets, with a good deal of noise; but you will be able to see nothing of them, or, at most, the twinkling of a white tail as they disappear.

But they are not always so shy. Once, when driving along a lonely road in a pony-cart, I noticed in the distance a deer with fine antlers, standing motionless at the right-hand edge of the track, with head erect, as if waiting. Soon he was joined by another, and they both paused together, until I had come almost close up to them, when they crossed leisurely in front of my pony, and stepped with stately tread into the beechen glade on the left. Again, in passing a fenced-in wood beside this same road, I counted seven or eight dappled deer standing amongst the oaks, close against the fence, and who hardly moved as we passed. It is the chance of seeing these beautiful creatures which makes a walk or drive through the forest so particularly attractive.

MARCH

'Winter chid aloud and sent
The angry North to wage his wars;
The North forgot his fierce intent,
And left perfumes instead of scars.
By those sweet eyes' persuasive powers,
Where he meant frost he scattered flowers.'

RICHARD CRASHAW.

MARCH

This is often a month of searching cold, while we wait and hope for the coming of 'tardy Spring.' The wan sunshine of the lengthening evenings has little comfort in it, and seems to have no power to help forward even the earliest flowers, so eagerly looked and longed for, while the bitter east wind dries up the soil, bleaching and taking away all colour from the dead leaves and dried fern, which had made so warm-tinted a carpet during the winter; and these pale ghosts of a past summer rustle beneath the sudden gusts of wind, or under the footsteps of rabbit or blackbird, with a sad, shivering sound.

But, in spite of these inclement mornings and evenings, the thrushes, chaffinches, and blackbirds are singing, and many birds are beginning to build their nests; the almond-tree on the island in the pond breaks out suddenly into rosy buds, and then into pale pink flowers, showing clear and dis-

tinct against the dull leaden sky whence the east wind blows.

But as the month advances the *Prunus pisardi* is covered with dead-white blossom, and its coppery leaves peep out amongst them. Soon orange, purple, and white crocuses, with brilliant yellow pistils, send their points up through the grass under the oak-tree and along the garden borders, while here and there an *Anemone fulgens* lifts up its drooping bud, and spreads a glorious scarlet star to greet the sunshine. The green spikes of daffodils and narcissi of all kinds are pushing up through the soil, and outside the woods, and along by the stream, large thorny bushes begin to be spangled with the flowers of the blackthorn. Let us examine a branch, thrust out so straight and stiffly from amongst the rest ; how like little pearls are the buds, growing closely to the stem, and what a pure white are the five-petaled flowers, dotted with brown stamens and clustered so thickly together! How like a mass of freshly-fallen snow, or wreath of sea-foam, is this thickly-crowded growth of myriad buds, the rugged branches showing black by contrast, where they can, here and there, be seen through the thick white blossoms. And it is always the

coldest and bleakest weather of the whole month that greets these buds to their unfolding!

Towards the later part of March, the wild daffodils, or 'Lent lilies,' send up their pale blue-green leaves and narrow buds, in damp places. I know a copse of hazels which follows the windings of a stream on either side, and there, from the moist ground, through the dead leaves, we may find these slender leaves and flower-stems rising up, changing from a green to a yellow bud, then opening out into the pale gold, drooping flower, with deeper yellow trumpet, of the beautiful wild English daffodil.

They come out here in such numbers that the banks of the stream seem to be lined with the carpet of rushlike leaves and the sheets of golden flowers, which dance and nod their slender heads in the breeze, and look too delicate to live at all, at such an inclement time of year, though they are, in fact, most hardy flowers, and stand up gaily against the east wind.

Following the course of the stream, it leads us out on to open meadow-land, where large trees stand at intervals, and under these trees and up the grassy slopes grow outspread masses of the daffodils,

gleaming in the distance, and making the ground beneath our feet into a veritable 'field of the cloth of gold.' In the chilly March sunshine they quiver and flash, now blown to one side, and showing only their pale calyxes, as they all trail towards the ground; then, taken suddenly backwards by the wind, the deep yellow corolla gives the effect of a flower shot with lemon and pale orange.

'A peck of March dust is worth a king's ransom' says an old proverb; and where there is much ploughed land, and farmers have to get their corn sown, it is, of course, everything to them to have the ground dry. In the open forest there is no corn-land, and there are no hedges, and consequently no sparrowsor finches to speak of—that is to say, no seed-eating and no purely hedgerow birds. Only where there are dwellings of men, and consequently horses, cows, or pigs, there also will the sparrow be.

But even if March *be* dry, the ground remains full of water in the forest, for the land drains with difficulty, most of it lying low, and having but little fall to the sea. And in this water in March the young grass begins to shoot, throwing up tender green spikes, three or four inches long.

It is this that forms so fatal a temptation to the

WILD DAFFODILS AT MINSTEAD.
MARCH.

ponies. All through the winter they have been hard put to it to get food enough, and if they have a foal with them (for the foals are dependent on their mothers when they are long over twelve months old, if no new offspring comes to debar them), the mares, by the end of the winter, get very poor and weak. Then they see this young, bright-green grass, and they cannot resist it, but go into the water for it, and not unfrequently get bogged, and when they try to pull out they have not got the strength to do it, and so, unless help comes, they may perish miserably in a very short time.

It is only hunger which impels them to this rash venture, for as a rule the forest pony knows and avoids all dangerous places of this kind. But not all the forest is wet as this ; up in the hazel woods one can walk dryshod, and see the tasselled nut-bushes hung thickly with drooping catkins, so aptly termed by children ' lamb's tails,' and gleaming in among them here and there, on the twigs, the little rosy tufts which indicate the coming nuts. It is curious that *red* should so often be the first colour of the fruit of a forest tree. We see it in the ' rosy plumelet ' which ' tufts the larch,' when

that which is going some day to be a hard brown cone is now but a baby plume of soft red scales, exactly resembling a flower. Few things can be more charming than these little ruby cones hanging on the slender sprays of the larch, amidst their setting of delicate green foliage, the prettiest herald of the coming spring.

APRIL

'April, April,
Laugh thy golden laughter,
Then, the moment after
Weep thy golden tears.'

WILLIAM WATSON.

'Tis a month before the month of May,
And the Spring comes slowly up this way.'

S. T. COLERIDGE.

APRIL

It is reasonable to expect some mild, balmy weather in April, when the west wind finds out the green budding leaves of the primrose and honeysuckle and the gray buds of the willow, coaxing them to open into soft balls clustering up the straight young shoots, with their halo of sweet, almond-scented yellow stamens, that go by the name of 'palm.' It is often at Easter-time that this spell of warm days and sunshine comes, waking the song of the birds into fuller life, and tempting them to prolong their sweetest notes far into the lengthening evening. It was this joyousness of coming spring which prompted the words of this old Easter carol—

'The world itself keeps Easter Day,
Saint Joseph's star is beaming;
Saint Alice has her primrose gay,
Saint George's bells are gleaming.'

What flower the latter name indicates I am not

able to say, but the Star of Bethlehem and the primrose are in abundant flower at this time of 'fair mid-spring.'

In the train of the west wind comes the rain, and April is often rather a wet month; but its soft rain, soaking into the ground, is what the bulbs and flower-roots most want, to carry away the effects of winter frost from the ground. And then, after these sudden and heavy showers, the sun shines again, and in the woody glades primroses line the edges of the ride, sparkling amongst their tufts of green leaves; and the dog-violets (we have no sweet ones here growing wild) and lungwort make patches of blue and lilac amongst them. But, looking through the thicket, all is still a network of bare branches, though a veil of thinnest, purest green begins to clothe the young thorn and hazel undergrowth. The dead leaves of last autumn still give their faded gray-brown colour to the ground, and rustle crisply with a touch of wind, making one fancy it is some living thing that moved.

But soon all this will be changed, and each day the green will grow stronger and fuller, and hide the dry branches and bleached leaves. Little curls of bracken have just begun to put up their

heads, the green, delicate leaves of speedwell, woodruff, and wood-sorrel, are spreading themselves over the ground, and the climbing honeysuckle is now covered with green shoots. The wild cherry is in full white blossom, its tall, slender spikes tossing in the wind, and tiny crimson buds are showing themselves on the wild crab-apples.

Down where the stream winds through the bog the colours were vivid this afternoon. The west wind was bringing up heavy clouds, through openings in which the sun shone brilliantly at times upon a deep purple line of distant trees, then on a nearer wood to the left, whose old oaks just began to be tinged with a very yellow green, above their rugged, pale-gray limbs. The wood was fringed with some fairy birches of emerald green tint, so transparent that their white stems could clearly be seen through it.

Sloping down from the wood, the ground of broken heather was gay with the orange-brown blossom of the sweet gale, or bog-myrtle, between which and the wood above spread a mass of golden gorse. The blue waters of the stream at my feet completed this rich feast of colour. I wandered along the bank of the little rivulet, between it and

the alder thicket, admiring the golden yellow blossoms of the marsh marigolds as they hung over the other bank and were reflected in the water. And there, in amongst the thin stems of the alders, lying on the boggy ground, was a dead pony—one of those that run wild in the forest, picking up a living as best they can. After a hard winter and cold spring, when fresh grass has hardly yet begun to grow, the poor things do sometimes succumb to weakness and chills.

It was a pathetic sight, as the poor, thin body lay motionless, to watch its companion, a little bay pony of about a year old, probably its own foal, with its coat of thick baby fur, standing over the other, a look of puzzled grief on its innocent face, and expressed by the quivering of its nostrils. So it stood for long, while I watched the sad group and wondered how long the faithful little friend had stood and mourned there. Its only movement was when it now and then bent its head over the dead one, and just touched the motionless hoof with its soft nose.

It is hard to say whether amongst the ponies in the forest the loss of a mother or the loss of her foal by a mother is the most pathetic—probably the

MATLEY WOOD AND BOG, FROM MATLEY PASSAGE.

little surviving foal feels the loss most. But for a time the distress of a mother, when she loses her young one, is very sad to witness.

We were driving once in July down a grassy glade, through one of the most beautiful parts of the forest, when, in the middle of a narrow track between the oaks and hollies, we saw a dark form stretched on the ground. When we got close to it it proved to be a singularly fine colt, about three months old; he was in splendid condition, and had not long been dead. A little blood from his nostril stained the ground, but how he had come to die it was impossible to say.

As we looked at him with a sorrowful wonder, the mother came trotting up and pushed her nose against him, urging the once brisk little creature to rise and follow. She went a few yards, and returned again and again, coaxing him to get up, nor could she understand at all how it was that he could lie so still and take no notice. To us it was a truly pathetic picture. She would, perhaps, soon forget it all, but for a day or two she would be sad and past all comfort. Such are the tragedies of wild animal life.

But to turn to something brighter. With April

come the cuckoo and the swallow, and that singular bird who seems to be akin to both of them, the nightjar, or fern-owl. There was, not far from our lodge, a stunted oak-tree, standing alone on a gorsey and heathery ridge: it was called the 'cuckoo-tree,' and on this the first cuckoo was always seen for many seasons. But a forest fire, which burnt the gorse along the ridge one Easter, killed the tree, and, though it still stood with naked branches against the sky for some years, it ceased to attract the cuckoo. But there are plenty of other trees at a little distance, on one or other of which, all through the months of April, May, and June, always by day, and often by night, we heard the cuckoo in the valley; often three of them answering one another from different points at once. To find the nest in which the female bird had placed her egg was a much harder matter, though we once found it, low down in a bush of honeysuckle, growing against a house, close to a doorway, through which traffic was constant all day long. One hears that swallows are becoming scarce; with us two pairs nested regularly in the porch and in the stable-loft.

Once, and once only, we found the nest of the

nightjar. This interesting bird, whose Latin name, *Caprimulgus*, signifying goat-sucker, is so shameful a libel, was fond of sitting in the daytime with its body pressed close to the ground on the gravel-path, just outside the windows of the house, and here we could watch it near enough to see its beautifully-speckled plumage and the wide, swift-like mouth, set with whiskers, enabling it to catch the moths, for which in the evening it was always hawking, with its curious chirring note, but with absolutely silent wing. It would come skimming mysteriously in the twilight over the housetop, and then down on the lawn, up again over the trees, and swooping round again along the moth-haunted bushes of rhododendron. The nest we visited was in the heather, just the slightest possible hollow in the ground, close to a furze bush. We went several times to see the two speckled eggs, and afterwards the curious toad-like young ones; the bird, unlike the woodcock, never remaining on her nest when discovered, but flying off, and then wheeling round with silent, anxious flight.

In this month, or even in March—for the bird is a very early breeder—a lover of Nature, who knows something of its individual habits, may, by careful

and observing search combined with luck, have the rare pleasure of finding, in some enclosure or forest thicket, the nest of the woodcock. The bird, getting up from the ground as you pass close by, will sometimes reveal what, but for her ill-judged movement, might for ever have escaped the most watchful eye. But if she betrays them, you may very soon find the four mottled eggs, very large for the size of the bird, and, but for their sharper tapering end, very like a plover's. They lie point to point in a little depression in the dead leaves with which the ground is covered, and with no attempt at concealment, for indeed none is needed; the plumage of the bird when sitting corresponds so exactly with the hue of her surroundings as to render her practically invisible.

Once, when we were driving up a colt, the animal jumped a little gully, and in doing so almost stepped on a woodcock. The bird was obliged to rise, and there we saw, close to a small oak sapling, the nest we might have long and vainly sought. We marked the spot by means of the sapling and the ditch, and several times we came with friends to show them the rare find; but it was not at all easy to see, even when you knew exactly where to look.

The bird was always on the nest and never moved, and until you caught sight of her bright eye, and so were guided to see her bill, it was not possible to distinguish her from the leaves on the ground about her.

Often standing within three or four feet of her, I would point and say, 'There! do you see her? just by that little bit of stick. That's it; you are looking straight at her.' But no, the answer always was, 'I can't see anything.' Again I pointed: 'Now, look at that yellowish leaf; then, two inches to the right, don't you see a round, bright spot? that's her eye.' At last the whole bird would break upon the sight, motionless but observing. And then how anyone could have been looking so long, straight at her without seeing her became the first marvel, and Nature's power of concealment the next; but that the bird should be aware of this, and trust so confidently to the similarity of herself and her surroundings, was what, perhaps, seemed the strangest thing of all. Quietly we would steal away, or as quietly as the dead leaves and sticks would permit, and she hatched her brood safely, in spite of our visits; but as soon as the chicks were grown, they quite disappeared, as they always

seem to do. Indeed, though it is not possible to be certain, it would seem, from various observations, that these birds, if reared in England, are never seen in winter in the place where they were bred.

MAY

'Oh, had I but Aladdin's lamp
If only for a day,
I'd try to find a link to bind
The joys that pass away.

'It should be May, and always May,
I'd wreathe the world with flowers,
I'd robe the barren wilderness,
And bring life's happy hours.'

EARLY MAY IN "THE ENCLOSURE."
WILD CRAB BLOSSOM.

MAY

May often comes in accompanied by north-east winds, varied on some days by showers of cold rain and even hail, and dark, heavy clouds pass over us. But after waiting for the true Maytime through day after day of cold winds, it comes at last; the breeze is soft, and full, warm sunshine gladdens all around. Daily the green mist on hazel and hawthorn bush thickens in the underwoods. The wild crab-tree has crept out into full bloom, the long drooping boughs studded with creamy-pink flower-cups, crimson buds, and tiny green leaves, the higher branches tossing their rosy foam into the air. In the orchard the apple-trees are in full flower, and we long for the sunny days to continue, so that this much-loved, fleeting blossom may stay in its perfection for a few days more, ere the time comes for dropping white petals on the grassy walk.

A thick border of white stars of the pheasant-

eye narcissus fringes the lawn, with many other kinds of white and cream clustered polyanthus-narcissi; and little tulips of deep rose-colour, yellow, dull red and orange, and the pale pink-and-white-striped 'cottage maid,' are coming up in the long grass of the 'wild corner,' under the double-blossomed cherry, the Siberian crab and quince trees, all putting forth their white buds, where the grass is starred with many-coloured spring flowers, like the foreground in a picture of Botticelli's, and bordered with little bushes, now one golden mass of double gorse.

Numbers of the quaintly-twisted green buds of parrot-tulips in the border show us just a glimpse of the gaudy colours they will display a little later, when their feather-like petals will lie spread out over the box-edgings and on the ground, in glorious, sprawling profusion, splashed and streaked with crimson, vermilion, yellow, and bright green. The lilac bushes show dark purple spikes, but are not yet in flower, though the pear and cherry-blossom are almost over. In the wood the budding bluebells have already begun to spread a gray-purple haze over the ground.

Yes, it should be May *always*, all the year round,

we think truly with all our heart, on a perfect May morning such as this. The sun shines from a pale blue sky, clear of clouds, and over the massed groups of delicate green beeches on the rising ground opposite is spread a soft blue haze, making them appear more distant than they really are, and deepening into an intense lapis-lazuli blue in their shadows. At the bottom of the slope an ordered line of oaks, still with their thin, later-budded foliage, and of a yellower green than that of the beeches, marks the division between field and open forest; and from these up to the lawn is spread a golden carpet of buttercups, reflecting the dazzle of the sunshine, and one or two taller ones here and there rising up above the brilliant mass, and waving in the soft breeze. Large daisies, pale cuckoo-flowers, dark purple orchises, and white narcissus, strayed from the garden, can be spied out in places amongst the tall grasses; but the buttercups certainly 'hold the field' against all rivals, and gladden our eyes with warmth and brilliancy.

But what is it loads that breeze with fragrance, and seems to make an intenser sunshine all around? Close to where I am standing the garden ends in a rampart of golden gorse, each bush with hardly

a speck of green visible amongst the varying shades of its massed flowers, from pale yellow to deep golden orange. The scent has all the freshness and glow of the spring in it, and something also that reminds one of the perfume of apricots, ripened on a warm garden-wall, as they used to ripen in the old days; but now, alas! so seldom have the summers heat enough to bring them to perfection that few people try to grow apricots out of doors.

Now, in the 'sweet o' the year,' when the forest is gloriously clad in its gold and green livery, it seems quite a sin to stay indoors on such a morning, so let us seek a favourite corner, screened by the cedar-tree and bushes of rhododendron, also a mass of pale lilac and crimson bloom. The air is musical with a soft hum of the many insects which love the honey of the rhododendron flower —large and small bumble-bees, hive-bees, the bee-hawk moth, and now and then a peacock, sulphur, or tortoise-shell butterfly, spread out their exquisitely-painted wings close to me, and settle for a moment or two on one of the globes of flower. Warm wafts of scent are in the air, blown across from the field; and it is sometimes the sweet-brier

FLOWER OF THE GORSE, FROM PARK HILL LAWN.

close by, or the delicate scent of the rhododendron flowers, and now again the rich, all-pervading odour of the sun-kissed gorse, of which one is most conscious. Soon two cuckoos were answering one another from tree to hedge; a 'yaffingale,' with his long-drawn, laughing cry, crossed the meadow in loops of flight, the green, iridescent sheen of his plumage, and the ruby of his head seeming to glow as he shot across the sunlight. A lark was pouring out his hurried song high up in the dazzling light fluttering and fluttering ever higher; then, suddenly ceasing, he dropped down into the middle of the long grass. It was by watching several of these precipitate descents, always into the same spot, that I at length found my way to his nest, in a hole that a cow's hoof had made when the soil was soft after autumn rains, and all round this hole the grass grew very green and thick. There I watched the little birds growing bigger and getting fledged, while the days grew nearer for the grass to be ripe, and the hay-cutting was imminent, and I trembled for the little nestful. Though we could protect it by marking the place and leaving the thick tuft of grass uncut, yet I feared that the parent birds might desert when their bower, left

quiet for so long, was suddenly invaded by the noisy machine. But on the very morning of the day when the hay-cutter began on the lowest corner of the field, I made my way through the tall daisies and grass to the little nest, and there it was, quite empty! So the young birds had learnt to fly, and been guided away to a safe hiding-place by their parents, just in time.

Let us follow the course of the rough wooden fence beyond the hedge of gorse. Here the ground falls slightly as we skirt the pond, and stand under the tall Scotch firs that guard it on this side—those firs, high up in which, on summer evenings, I have watched a family of baby brown owls, huddled close together like softest balls of downy feathers, and making the funniest of 'huffling, and buffling, and snuffling' noises (as Edward Lear would say), their baby attempts at the family hoots and two-whoos, until a dark shadow glided through the trees, and the broad wings of the mother owl hovered over them while she gave them food, and then sailed away again in the dim twilight.

Here is the plank bridge that leads across to the island, a place full of delights, with its fringe of

tall reeds and rush-grass, in amongst which, every summer, there is *sure* to be a moor-hen's nest; and I hunt for this each year, until I come upon the warm, cosy-looking nest of dried rushes, with four or six of the red-speckled eggs in it, and the mother bird flops off into the water and disappears amongst the reeds on the other side of the pond. Sometimes in winter a pair of wild-duck will visit this pond, and *once* I have seen a kingfisher there. In August, one day, I was standing near the pond, listening to the various notes of birds in the trees round it (for this is a favourite haunt of theirs), when a harsh screech caught my ear, and struck me at once as certainly not belonging to any English bird. I looked up into an oak-tree which hangs over the water, and there, perched on its highest branch, was a large white cockatoo with yellow crest! We tried to tempt him with seed and bread to come down to the ground, but though he answered to our call, and flew from the oak to other trees, nothing would induce him to come lower down; and, after watching him for most of the afternoon, all our attempts to entice him to us having failed, we were called in to tea. Coming out again afterwards, the bird had disappeared,

and we never saw him again, nor could we ever discover who he belonged to or where he came from. But he must have flown a long way, and we hoped that he found his own home again, and was not lost in the forest, nor fell a victim to some enemy there. From the banks of the pond, where primroses grow thickly down to the water's edge, under the ivy-clad oak which leans over the water and furrows the soft soil with its roots, we follow the boundary-line of Scotch firs down the side of the meadow. One of these fir-trees was broken off by a winter gale, leaving a stump of about four feet high still standing and split open, so that a narrow crack ran down deep into the stump, and this confined space was chosen by a tree-creeper in June to build her nest in. This was nothing but an upright pillow of moss, hair, and grass, and the little birds, deep down in the crack, looked as though flattened between its sides, and how they had room to grow large enough to fly out and to develop their wings and limbs was a puzzle.

There are many open spaces, or 'lawns,' in the forest; some are mainly heathery, others all grass, and it is to these last that the cattle and ponies

love to resort. Here they ‘ shade ’ in the summer —a misleading term to any but a forester, for it means the assembling of the animals in a dense crowd in the middle of an open, sunny space, where for an hour or two in the heat of the day they stand with heads down, whisking their long tails and taking a sort of mid-day siesta standing. Some will tell you that they do this to avoid the forest flies, but certainly they are covered with flies as they stand in the open. Possibly the flies keep more still in the sunshine, and do not tickle them so much, or it may be that the ordinary stinging flies are more active when under the trees. The forest fly proper never stings. But whatever be their aim, the ponies do not lie down when ‘ shading,’ but stand huddled close together, and after a time all disperse to feed.

One of the most frequented of these shading spots is called Longwater, where a stream runs between low banks, through a mile-long plain of close-cropped turf, and here you are sure to find from thirty to a hundred ponies and heifers at any time from April to October. This riband of bright green, bounded on either side by the brown and purple heather, is like a miniature Nile Valley.

Down the centre runs the brimming stream, and as you approach it you find a fringe of golden marsh marigolds along the margin, and here I once saw a very pretty sight. The water was almost level with the grassy bank, and between the bunches of the marigolds there floated a wild duck, who had just brought off her brood. It was a large 'clutch': ten little balls of yellow fluff, with their tiny beaks all pointed one way, were swimming at her side, taking their first journey, while she moved in the midst of them, like a man-of-war among a crowd of harbour-boats. The fulness of the channel, which brought the bird's body on a level with the bank, made one think of the boats one sees sailing so quaintly through the fields in Holland; while the narrowness of the stream, with its clustering flowers, made the picture of the duck and her little ones not only quaint, but charming.

We are now nearing the close of May, and the woods begin to lose their fresh emerald and yellow green, and to grow a fuller tone each day; and everywhere the thorns are putting on their white mantles, and, against the intense blue of the sky, seem to make a fretwork with intricate tracery of interlacing boughs, inlaid with bosses of pearl, trying

MARSH MARIGOLDS AT LONGWATER.
SPRING.

to make up to us for the loss of the sweet crab-blossom.

Now, too, 'Spring paves the woods afresh with matchless blue,' and the bluebells are in full beauty and spread a sheet of pure colour across the lower part of the wood, near the 'Two Oaks Gate.' They grow in many other patches also, and always best where the soil is most sandy. Oh, to keep them thus, just as they are now, for a little longer! that we may feast our eyes on their fulness of colour and beauty. The balmy scent of pine-trees, warmed by the sun, and of hawthorn flowers, is in the air, as we look, and cannot look our fill, at the soft flowery carpet.

> 'And round us all the thicket rang
> To many a flute of Arcady.'

For the nightingale now joins her song to those of the throstle and blackbird, and numbers of the lesser birds add to the chorus with a joyous note.

In the garden we have enormous crimson 'gesner' tulips with tall stems, and the yellow and scarlet 'parrots' are out in full profusion. The purple flag iris is spreading fresh fleur-de-lys each day, and the lilac hangs over the garden-wall. Several plants of yellow broom are flowering in golden

masses, and huge bushes of rhododendrons stand covered with creamy white, crimson, or rose-pink flowers. These iridescent bubbles of bloom are loveliest, I think, when seen against the soft blue-green background of distant trees on a hazy spring morning, or at night, when they gleam out like silver from the twilight, and great shadowy moths dart out from amongst the leaves to feed on the dewy fragrance of the rhododendron blooms, with which the evening air is filled. It was on one of these bushes, on a May evening some years ago, that the capture was made of a beautiful specimen of the Livornica, or striped hawk-moth, which we carefully preserve. Such a take has not, I believe, been made in England twice during the last thirty years.

As the bluebells fade and disappear a fresh flower takes their place, and the more open parts of the wood are covered with a mantling of golden green, where the wood-spurge spreads thick and far its fine heads, sometimes attaining a height of two or three feet, while in other places the bracken sends up its thick, curled stems, which, unfolding, cover up the traces of the poor waning hyacinths, and gradually obtain undisputed possession of the ground.

BLUEBELLS IN THE OAK WOOD.
MAY.

JUNE

'Love's friends had woven from his bowers
In scorn of silk, a robe of flowers,
All worked about with amorettes,
And tied with dainty bandelets,
While blossoms of all colours were
Besprinkled o'er it here and there,
With violets, pansies, bird's-eye blue,
And flowers untold of varied hue;
Sweet-scented roses, red and pale,
Round which flew many a nightingale.'

Romance of the Rose.

JUNE

On a day in early June our footsteps are led across the heath to an unenclosed wood, a lonely, rambling place that slopes down a little hill. Above are great beeches, under whose masses of foliage the grassy rides wind in and out, and there the rabbits sit up on their heels, and the wood-pigeons flap suddenly out from the trees as we pass beneath; and we may see them thread their way through the branches,

> 'Or in the beechwood watch the screaming jay
> Shoot up betwixt the tall trunks, smooth and gray.'

Below, the wood loses itself in small oaks and thorns, and is merged into a heathery plain, where the trails of honeysuckle wind themselves round the stunted may-bushes. From tree to tree flit the redstarts, shaking their fiery tails, and the squirrels stamp and scold from the beech boughs above. At the edge of the trees the bracken, later in the

summer, spreads its broad fronds into a green sheet; but now it is only just uncurling, and the ground, scattered with little yellow, pink, and white flowers, is not yet overspread with the branching fern. I had come to hunt for a rare flower, which (wise thing!) does not show its head until the bracken has made for it an effectual screen. But to-day the last bluebells are still flowering here, and as we gather quite a fresh bunch of them, it is a pleasure to smell the bluebell scent once more, which takes one back to May. In our own wood nothing is left of them but the dull-green seed-vessels, where once the ground was blue.

In the garden, lilies of the valley have been flowering in sweet profusion, but we have come to the last of them now. How dewy sweet are the *maiglöckchen* when first we begin to gather them! How delightful to pull the long sprays of flower, with their ivory bells and pale-green buds, to fill our hands with them, and bring them indoors to fill the room with fragrance! But the last, dried-up ones have lost their scent and their charm, so are left to ripen into round red berries amongst their sheltering leaves, and their places can be filled now with the early summer roses, the Malmaison,

W. A. Richardson, and Gloire de Dijon, of which we can now gather large clusters, and also of the tiny white and yellow Banksia rose, whose 'fragrant knots of flower' have such a peculiar charm of scent, and a few of the very first white pinks are also to be gathered now.

Towards the middle of June, when the bracken spreads its fully-opened layers of green beside the grassy tracks and over wide spaces of open lawn, and when foxgloves send up their tall spikes under the shade of the oaks, is a perfect time for roaming in the forest; and I can recall one such ramble, in an exquisite day of June, which led us through solitary woods and by unfrequented paths. Passing through our nearer woodland, out into the valley beyond, where the ground is tufted with heather, its pale pink bells just coming into bloom, we crossed what is usually a swamp in winter, but now is dried up, and rough with the holes that cattle and ponies have made with their hoofs. Then along a winding cart-track, crested on either bank with tall fern and shaded by great oaks, we waded through the bracken, and by a gate into an enclosed wood, where we followed a broad green ride, warm and bright with sunshine, and here and

there a foxglove unfolded its pink buds beside the path; out again into open forest, where broad oaks sheltered us from the sun, and where the bracken grew thickly, but standing back where its masses were intersected by narrow grassy tracks. Here we espied numbers of graceful, tall butterfly orchises, hiding under the bracken fronds, but their greenish-white spikes easily to be seen, if one stooped down amongst the fern; and how fairy-like a vision it is to kneel low down amid the fern, right under it, and to look along the tall, slender, gray-green stems, far away into the distance, and to see the carpet of yellow and pink vetches, the tall creamy-white butterfly orchis, sweet of scent, the pink heather, the yellow cinque-foil, and many other shy blossoms that love to hide under the shade of the bracken! Look down upon it from above, and nothing of them is to be seen, only the broad, meeting dark-green leaves.

The sun gleamed and glinted on the broad bracken fronds, making them now a clear green, like emeralds, now gray or white where they reflected the sky. Tennyson has recorded this effect of bracken in the sunlight, as will be seen from a short extract out of 'Pelleas and Ettare.'

FOXGLOVES IN "THE ENCLOSURE."
JUNE.

'Near him a mound of even-sloping side,
Whereon a hundred stately beeches grew,
And here and there great hollies under them;
But for a mile all round was open space
And fern and heath; . . . . .
Through that green-glooming twilight of the grove
It seemed to Pelleas that the fern without
Burnt as a living fire of emeralds,
So that his eyes were dazzled looking at it.'

The scent of the aromatic, pale orchis was in the air, a woodpecker flitted from one low thorn-bush to another, butterflies—sulphur, tortoiseshell, and white—spread out their wings wide upon the warm fern—everything was basking in the fresh, matchless June sunshine, and this was a delectable spot to enjoy it in. Have we not all an ideal place of this sort in our minds, that we long to return to each year as the season comes round, sure that only there can June be seen in its full beauty, and the sunshine, the hawthorn flower, the orchis, and fern, and foxgloves, ever and always are to be found and delighted in there?

But to continue our walk: threading the narrow paths between the fern, we found ourselves in another wood, whose principal ride was lined with white acacia-trees in full bloom, round which white butterflies wheeled and fluttered. Then out on to

a high heath, where, growing up against and inside of a clump of prickly gorse, we espied something blue, and fancied, from a distance, that it must be a stray, belated bluebell; but it proved to be something much more rare, a wild blue columbine; and growing near it, we came upon many others, their blue of a much clearer and purer hue than has any garden columbine. Descending the heath, and crossing its wide space, we are led along the valley of a stream, the waters of which wind between sandy banks, clear and shallow, over a gravel bed, between a grove of oaks on either hand, making of it a true fairy bower as they arch and twine their branches across the narrow channel and reflect their massive forms in the still pools below.

Now, across a little plank bridge, the path strikes into the depths of the oak-wood, and here, on the banks at each side, very tall foxgloves stand sentinel, and we look across at a miniature forest of them, standing in thick groups and rosy masses as far as the eye can reach, in a thousand pinnacles of clustered bloom, rising and falling with the undulations of the ground, and bathed with a warm radiance in the evening light.

On another June day I crossed a bit of low

boggy ground, where two narrow streams draw the water down into the valley; and, growing close to one of the little bridges, found blue forget-me-nots, which, however, are small and pale in this light soil. In the bog, bright yellow spikes of asphodel were standing, and silver cotton-grass, while the sweet bog-myrtle began to put forth its leaves, coming after the tufted yellow-brown flower, and the air was scented with the aromatic odour of the tender shoots.

Now I have come to a dry, grass-grown cart-track skirting the edge of a beech-wood, where many flowery treasures are to be found. Later, in July, the rare red gladiolus usually puts up a few flower-heads here, often right in the middle of the track, amongst rank grasses, as well as under the bracken, where it is well concealed, and amongst the thick heather clumps.

Stunted thorns, whose white blossom is now all over, rise up here and there from the thick under-growth of heath and bracken beside the cart-track,

> 'Nor lack they many a banner fair,
> For, twinkling with the dewdrops' sheen,
> The briar-rose fell in streamers green,
> And creeping shrubs of thousand dyes
> Waved in the west wind's summer sighs,'

although their own flowers are past ; and on one of them, rising up and encircling its highest branch, grows a perfect wreath of honeysuckle, its warm red stems growing in most graceful curves, twined together—and the flowers, what exquisite tints of cream and salmon-pink shaded with deep crimson buds! A beautiful natural crown of flowers, whose 'glittering streamers waved and danced' in the June sunshine, while the warm air was filled with its scent. Its richness and depth of tint was such that I could not resist gathering the beautiful wreath just as it was, and it gladdened our eyes for many days afterwards.

In some parts of the wood the ground is scattered with the compact little threefold leaves of wood-strawberries, with star-like white flowers, and crimson fruit hiding under the leaves. What a complete little picture is one of these plants, with flower and fruit growing together, and finished off by the leaves and trailing shoots! And how delicious is the flavour of a perfectly ripe wood-strawberry! The French have a saying, 'Fraiche comme une fraise,' very much the equivalent of our 'Fresh as a rose,' and it is hard to determine whether the rose, or the fruit deserves the epithet best. Straw-

berries are said to have derived their name from the old English custom of threading them on long bents of grass or straws as they were gathered, and taking them thus, for sale at the country fairs and markets.

The pied wagtails, or 'dish-washers,' have been very busy on the lawn of late, running about after grubs, with much chattering as they flew up with them into their nests among the clematis and rose-trees, and one morning they introduced the dearest little mite of a chick, just off the nest. It was a most graceful little miniature wagtail, exactly like its parents, but about half the size, and of light gray plumage, without the black and white, so marked in the older birds, and its tail not yet grown to the proper length, though it managed to wag it, quite in the correct manner of their family, as it ran over the grass on its tiny legs, rather timidly, in the wake of its parents.

Following upon these brilliant June days we very often have storms and rain ; and I recall one heavy, thundery morning, when dark clouds were coming up the sky, when there was not a breath of wind, and the heat of the sun felt sultry and oppressive. The garden flowers seemed to throw

out, that morning, their intensest perfume, and crowds of insects filled the air, as though their instinct warned them to make the most of the fine morning, for they would before long be driven to leafy shelters by the coming storm.

The clumps of crimson sweet-william gave out wafts of warm scent, and the bee-hawk and humming-bird hawk-moths hung and poised, motionless, on outstretched wing, just above the pink and scarlet verbenas, their long proboscis seeking the honey. The gum-cistus was one blaze of wide-opened, tissue-paper-like flowers, each petal marked with a dark red splash at the centre; and on the Scotch briar-bush, in one of its half-opened buds, which have the true attar-of-roses scent, I found one of the beautiful green rose-beetles, whose wing-sheaths are like an emerald shot with golden lights, but who will eat the heart out of the flower in a very short space of time. Beside the lawn a bush of guelder-rose hung,

> 'Her silver globes light as the foaming surf
> That the wind severs from the broken wave.'

But the mutterings of thunder grow nearer, the masses of leafy woodland across the valley look an

unnaturally brilliant, sun-lighted green against the dark, lurid thunder-clouds, and the first heavy drops begin to splash upon the walk, and soon that green is hidden in a gray, driving storm of rain.

JULY

'When summer brings the lily and the rose
She brings us fear; her very death she brings
Hid in her anxious heart, the forge of woes,
And, dumb with fear, no more the mavis sings.'

WILLIAM MORRIS.

JULY

The last of the white pinks are faded now; a week ago they were a delicious, fragrant mass in a silver bowl. But their place there is not badly filled by rich, dark spikes of giant mignonette, and the first flowers on the white jessamine by the garden door are now appearing.

It is a day of intense, glorious sunshine, after thunderstorms and two days of heavy skies and pouring rains. How the leaves sparkle and glisten with light this morning!

Between garden and field the fence is wreathed with long, graceful bramble sprays, now sending out spikes of white and pink blossom right and left. In the wood I was standing in a green ride, watching, in an oak over my head, a number of little long-tailed tits, chattering and flitting from bough to bough, when I heard a faint thud near me, and, turning to the right, saw a fine rabbit sitting up, with his fore-paws held up, and a little beyond him,

higher up the ride, was a fox-cub, watching him. The rabbit made one or two more thuds with his hind feet (a warning to his family, most likely, to be careful), and then made off under the bushes. The fox also turned and trotted slowly away.

Round the low bramble-bushes that are coming out fast into flower are flitting numbers of the graceful white-admiral butterflies. Two of these, and three of the large red-brown fritillaries, are all clustered upon one spray of pink bramble-flower, and with the sun shining on their wings, and lighting the silver under-side of the fritillaries and the shot purple-black of the admirals, the effect was brilliant indeed.

I also saw an exquisite pair of red-admiral butterflies; one rested for a long time upon a young oak sapling close to me, with its gorgeous wings spread out flat, waiting for its mate, who was sure to be not far away. I waited, too, revelling in the woodland air, full of life and scent, and was rewarded, after about five minutes, by seeing a vermilion flash in the air, as the glorious butterfly floated down from a large oak-tree, and joined the other on its slender spray.

It was close to this spot that we found the nest

of the wood-wren, a tiny bower over-arched with wreaths of bramble, blades of grass, and strawberry-leaves, and resting on the ground, where the eggs were quite hidden under the leafy dome. And often may be found the whitethroat, or 'haychat's,' nest, woven entirely of dried grass, lined with hair, and filled with red speckled eggs, the nest a little above the ground and built amongst the fronds of bracken or hidden under bramble-leaves.

One hears the croak of the woodcock, sometimes exchanged for a whistling cry, as he passes over the tree-tops at evening, going towards or from the cover. Lying on a broad, dark-green bramble-leaf, I saw one evening what appeared to be a bit of dead, rotten stick, that had fallen from an oak above and broken in two pieces with the fall. But something impelled me to look closer, and the object proved to be two buff-tip moths, whose large, soft heads, of a light buff colour, and gray bodies and closed wings, exactly imitated the rough bark and rotten wood of a dead stick.

In the beech glade, where the little clear stream deepens its channel through soft yellow sand, and gradually undermines it from beneath the twisted roots of the beech-trees, the banks in some places

are crested with thickly-growing bracken stems, in others grown over with soft turf, and

> 'Here are cool mosses deep,
> And through the moss the ivies creep';

while, flying backwards and forwards across the water, or poising for a moment on stems of rush or loosestrife, are the many-coloured dragon-flies, some with thin turquoise-blue bodies, others a deep blue or bright green with transparent wings, while another in its flight makes a 'rapid and radiant passage of purpled wings.'

Here is a ford across the shallow gravel bed of the stream, and below, round a bend, it widens out into quite a broad and deep pool, and it is this pool that the lovely insects delight to haunt; and, looking across it, we see the woodland becoming dim in the distance, like trees worked in old tapestry, with shades of blue or yellow-greens, light and dark, and faded with age; and in imagination we can almost fancy them as leading into Spenser's land of faerie and romance, that fair country of dreams.

Early in July, on a day of perfect sunshine, a soft blue mist hung over the distant trees in the early morning, and on the lawn the air was sweet

IN THE QUEEN'S BOWER.
MIDSUMMER.

with the scent of limes in flower. I walked over a rough, tufted hillside, where the red heath, or bell-heather, is beginning to colour the edges of the track with its full, deep crimson, as well as the pink heath, which began to open early in June. Wafts of scent from the bog-myrtle blew across the valley of the little stream.

Across a low bridge, nestling under bushes of dogwood, spindle-tree, wild guelder-rose, dog-rose, sweet-briar, and many other berry-bearing shrubs, we come to a dry, soft path under Scotch firs. Here a squirrel was playing on the ground until I approached, when he hopped across the path, and ran by jerks up a pine-stem, grunting as he went.

Through long, rank tussocks of grass, I turned into the track where I had come before, in June, to gather honeysuckle. The bracken is taller now beside it, and of a deeper, duller green, and under it the heather gleams red here and there, and the red wild gladiolus hides. The butterfly orchises are all over now and the foxgloves waning, their lower stems bare, and only a few flowerets still opening at the very top of the elongated stems; and, although this still July heat has a charm of its own, the freshness of early summer is over.

Onward over the higher ground and through avenues of over-arching oaks, till the edge of the wood is reached, skirted with beeches in their heavy midsummer foliage, making dark masses of shadow at the margin of the sunny, open moorland beyond. All the ground here is dry and crisp to the tread, as we cross a little causeway over the low boggy tract and ascend another rising ground crowned with woods. First a band, skirting it, of Scotch firs, then we penetrate amongst oaks, intersected with grassy rides, now quite dried and brown, and the centre of the wood and its highest point is crowned with a clump of very fine, tall beeches. This remote wood is a real Paradise for butterflies, as they are so seldom disturbed or attacked here; and on this hot July day they were flying about in clouds, the large, brilliant fritillaries, white-admirals, meadow-browns, ringlets, wood-argus, small blues, some of the large creamy-white and sulphur butterflies (though these last are more numerous in the early spring), clear-wing flies, and those gaudy flies with a red head and blue and green body; and sometimes—sound of dread!—the deep organ-pipe of a hornet's wings.

As I stopped for a moment in the middle of a

ride, trying to observe how many various kinds of butterflies and insects swarmed in the air around, and holding an orchis that I had just gathered, a splendid fritillary sailed up, and settled upon the flower in my hand, staying there long enough to give me time to examine the rings and spots of elaborate markings on the copper-coloured wings.

The charms of all this beautiful insect-life tempted one to linger long, watching them, and, in returning, I skirted the wood on the way home, outside its oak paling, where lies a solitary pool, one side quite filled up, in May and June, by the thick trefoil leaves of the wild bog-bean, and its delicate white-laced flowers. Near to this I noticed a depression in the sandy ground, and a few small pheasant feathers lying about, where evidently a hen pheasant had been enjoying a dust-bath, and, close to the feathers, I saw the body of a brown lizard, minus the legs and tail. What tragedy, I thought, has been enacted here? Do pheasants eat lizards?

White lilies are now the glory of the garden, a glittering silvery mass in the morning sun, seen against the misty blue-green of distant trees. Golden, carmine, and salmon-shaded alstromerias,

too; orange lilies, marigolds, sweet-peas, columbines—golden, red, lilac, or combinations of these shades—make a joyous show.

In one border, under the terrace wall, are some splendid delphiniums; the tallest of these, and also the first to come into bloom, has very long spikes, four or five of them, of the deepest, richest blue. Each flower of which the spike is composed, when we come to examine it, has an inner 'petticoat' of carmine pink, and an outer 'skirt' of purest ultramarine.

Next to it is a variety of which the flowers have a petticoat of shot lavender-pink and the skirt of pale cerulean blue. All these innumerable twofold flowers, crowded together into one tall, thick spire, give a richness and iridescence of colour, like rubies, amethysts, sapphire, and turquoise all massed together.

Another has larger, single flowers of a cobalt blue, with a white spot in the centre, and another spike of the same shade of blue has a black centre; and all these variations of blues and royal purples are indeed a feast for the eyes to dwell upon.

I am watching two exquisite buds upon different rose-trees—one is a Safrano, and salmon-pink, the

THE LILY BORDER.
JULY.

other L'Idéal, a deep, rosy salmon shade. Neither will be of so good or rich a colour when fully out. The Jaune Désprez, on a pergola, is bursting into numbers of creamy orange roses of the sweetest scent, and the Crimson Rambler makes a gorgeous rosy-red mass, and tosses its thick clusters of bloom high in the air above.

A bed of old-fashioned stocks now in flower has, amongst many of the ordinary crimsons and whites, some curious and uncommon shades of colour: a pale strawberry-and-cream flower-head, and one of deep madder purple, also some of a pale, and some a deep mauve. But the most charming of all has a thick head of bloom of a colour—how can it be described?—It is not exactly that of the mulberry, for it is too red; it is not brick colour, for it is too blue, but something between these two. We possess an old Crown Derby china dish, on which are painted a streaked yellow and red tulip, a purple anemone, a pale blue convolvulus, and a head of stock, and, on comparing the painted china with this living flower of the stock, we find that the colour of the two is identical.

In the Forest rides the little upright centaury is now springing: at the edges of the ruts, from mossy

tufts at their sides, and where the ground is in some places, away from the shade of trees, dried up and dusty, appears its slender stem, straight, clean-cut leaves, and little starry, pale-pink flowers in a cluster at the top, reminding us of a plant that we may see painted, on a gold ground, in the border of an illuminated missal. There is a little St. John's wort, too, that is much like the centaury in growth, and has tiny golden stars of flowers and reddish orange buds. These two are often to be seen growing together amongst the bracken or along the open rides, and the ground is overspread in some places with the long, narrow leaves and lilac-blue flowers of the wood scabious. Now, also, we may look for the wood epipactis, its long flower-shoots studded with greenish-brown flowers, rising erect from the bramble undergrowth.

On summer evenings, when the lawn is dry and the air balmy and warm, as we sit under the lime-tree, whose luscious scent is stronger now even than by day, we can hear the croaking of frogs from the marsh below, and the screechings and soft hoots of owls, as their dim shapes sometimes sail by us across the grass towards the tall firs, which are echoed by distant, answering hoots, far off into the forest;

and the nightjar chases its prey, now high in air, now on the ground in front of us. The distant tinkle of a cow-bell or the neigh of a pony is heard at intervals through the scented darkness, and the stillness and restfulness of Nature at this time cannot but be felt, and is well expressed, I think, in these lines of Longfellow's:

> 'From the cool cisterns of the midnight air
> My spirit drank repose;
> The fountain of perpetual peace flows there,
> From those deep cisterns flows.'

THE POND AT PARK HILL.
JULY.

AUGUST

'The gold that's heaped beside her hand,
In truth rich prize it were;
And rich the dreams that wreathe her brows
With magic stillness there;
And he were rich who should unwind
That woven golden hair.'

D. G. Rossetti.

AUGUST

August is not the season of the year in which the Forest shows to the best advantage. Many beauties it has even then, and for those who can only come and visit it late as this, having spent the rest of the year in towns or in treeless country, it is even now enchanting with its wealth of foliage, its restful, cool greenery, and the purity of its air. But those who have lived beside it through the ineffable freshness of spring and early summer, and seen that procession of sweet wild flowers bloom and fade in their turns, find a certain deadness and monotony in the uniform dark, dull green which now clothes the oaks and beeches, and entirely hides, as with a thick mantle, the beauty and symmetry of their curving branches; and there is very little to make a contrast with this ever-pervading dusky green.

But the moorland is now overspread with crimson heather in full bloom, and growing amongst it, and

about by the edges of the almost dried up bogs, we may find plenty of the blue pneumonanthe gentian. Its one or two flowers, growing on an upright stem, sometimes to the height of three or four inches, are much the same in size and shape, and almost of as deep an ultramarine blue, as the large Alpine gentian. It grows abundantly in some of the moorland tracts of the Forest, and its azure stars shine out and sparkle in the sunshine, from amongst the brown roots of heather, the dark peat and lichen. The reach of low-lying land where run the two little streams is dry and passable now, and here has grown up quite a harvest-field of yellow ragwort, its tall heads of golden flower showing with brilliant effect against the background of gray alders, and harmonizing well with this 'soft and golden time' of August, as though to make up to us for the absence of any other harvest-fields in the Forest.

From the lawn this mass of bright colour shows well in the distance, and one afternoon as we sat here and watched it, a more than usual commotion and chattering seemed to be going on in one of the rhododendron bushes, always the resort of numbers of small birds, principally sparrows.

Louder and louder grew the tumult, until out from amongst the leaves came the dark form of a sparrow-hawk, holding in its claws a poor little screaming chaffinch, and flew low and swiftly over the field towards the wood. Involuntarily I started up in pursuit, before realizing how hopeless was any idea of trying to save the poor little victim, and astonished at the audacity of the sparrow-hawk to venture in broad daylight, and so close to the house, to come and carry off its prey.

The late-flowering clematis twines its countless shoots and tendrils round about the high stone balustrade, and contrasts its rich purple masses against the dark firs behind, and at sunset, when the fir-stems gleam with a ruddy light, the clematis flowers also reflect with a glow of warmth the crimson of the western skies.

Here, on the top of a stone ball on the balustrade, the peacock has his favourite perch, where the brilliant blue-greens of his plumage are displayed to advantage. The peahen insists on choosing the most unprotected places for her nest, in the field or wood, where the eggs are almost sure to be harried by stoat or hedgehog, and where she herself is in imminent danger of being pounced upon and carried off by

a fox. But this summer she made her nest in a hollow of the field, where it was protected by a fence, and we watched eagerly for the chicks to come out.

One morning, on visiting the nest, I found that an egg had hatched, but both chick and peahen had disappeared, and I began to search in the grass for it, and, hearing a loud chirp, as of a young bird calling for help, I followed the sound of the cry, and came upon a baby chick amongst the long grass near the pond, which I at first took to be the missing peachick that I was in search of. But, on taking it up in my hand, I saw a pink beak, black plumage, and, greatest surprise of all, large pink webbed toes! instead of the brown speckled down and tiny legs and feet of a peachick. This changeling continued to chirp loudly in my hand, and an answer came from amongst the rushes, and then I knew that it was a baby moorhen that had wandered too far from the pond on its first inland journey. So I set it down by the edge of the water, and, following its mother's voice, it launched off on the surface and disappeared amongst the reeds. Later in the day our peahen marched majestically into the garden, followed by her own chick, safe and sound.

SCOTCH FIRS AND GARDEN WALL AT
PARK HILL. EVENING LIGHT.

By the woodland tracks the centaury still grows tall and fair, and one morning we were admiring one particularly fine pink cluster of this, when, in the brilliant morning sun, two sulphur butterflies came glancing down the ride, and settled for a moment upon the flowers. One of them was of rather a pale lemon yellow, the other a much deeper yellow, with the red spots very distinct on his wings; a very large dragon-fly, with wide-stretched transparent wings and green enamel body, also flitted up and down the path close to the pink centaury, and added to the variety of colour.

A thick group of larches stand in the middle of the wood, under and amongst which some tall slender thistles are growing, and their lilac-tufted flowers are turning into white, downy seed. Around these there is a fluttering of little wings, and, watching quietly from a distance, we see that a family of goldfinches have found out their favourite food, and five or six of them are now poised on the thistle-heads, bending them down with their weight, or hanging by their claws from below the flowers. A number of blue tits have also joined in the feast, and it is delightful to see the graceful curves of the necks and bodies, and lithe movements of the tiny

birds, and with it all is such a twittering of joyous notes, and such a flutter and flash of golden and blue wings, all expressing the gaiety and light-heartedness of these bright little birds.

SEPTEMBER

'I say: Alas! our fruit hath wooed the sun
Too long; 'tis fallen and floats adown the stream.
Lo, the last clusters! Pluck them every one,
And let us sup with summer; ere the gleam
Of autumn set the year's pent sorrow free,
And the woods wail like echoes from the sea.'

D. G. Rossetti.

SEPTEMBER

Our feelings on visiting the garden in September are chiefly sad ones. The weather is hot and still, but the heavy dews each night leave the grass white and sparkling in the morning, and remind us unpleasantly of the white frosts that are coming. The grass in the meadows is long, lush, and drenched with wet, and yellow leaves from the sadly-thinned lime-tree are scattered over the lawn.

Lanky, overgrown yellow and orange African marigolds, sunflowers, and rudbeckias make gaudy masses of colour here and there, and try to cheat us into thinking that it is summer still; but in vain—all is damp, mouldering, and sodden, past its beauty and freshness, and beginning to droop towards its end. A few stray roses, China pink, Malmaison, and Gloire de Dijon, may still be found, and will continue to bloom for some time yet. But their outer petals are turning brown, and the inner ones puckered with the heavy dews.

Michaelmas daisies are flowering in profusion, and the white *Anemone japonica;* and nasturtiums throw out broad leaves to shelter their flowers of deep copper-red, orange, and pale straw-colour.

> 'The yellow flowers, grown deeper with the sun,
> Were letting fall their petals, one by one.'

And as the sunflower petals drop, the inner disc of seeds grows larger, and becomes a haunt of wasps and bumble-bees, seeking for the last drops of honey.

Things have not come to quite such a melancholy pass in the woods, for hazel-bushes are ripening their nuts, and the green clusters, with the nut inside them growing and expanding, are abundant and tempting to gather. Blackberries also are fast coming to maturity, the low bushes covered with soft juicy purple berries, which offer a feast to the birds and squirrels, as well as for children who come a-blackberrying with their baskets. Dewberries, with a blue, plum-like bloom upon them, are beautiful to look at, but difficult and unprofitable to gather. Their milk-white flower is often in bloom at the same time as the berries ripen.

The trailing stag's-horn moss is now to be found creeping over and through the turf, and amongst the roots of the heather, spreading out long, branched shoots, like a deer's antlers, soft, furry, and of a bright green. One can pull out a long, long trail of this sometimes, forming a perfect natural wreath. The club moss is of the same species, but not nearly so graceful; it sends up stiff, straight little columns of green, which are well described by its name.

The orchard trees stand laden with fruit, and the colour of the apples grows daily more mellow and deep in the ripening sunshine. Golden pippins hang like amber from the laden boughs of some of the trees; others bear a rosy fruit streaked with yellow; on others, again, the apples are of a deep crimson colour streaked with green.

'The fruit-hung branches moved, and suddenly
The trembling apples smote the dewless grass,
And all the year to autumn-tide did pass.'

WILLIAM MORRIS.

OCTOBER

'Until man's heart grows humble, and reaches out
To the least glimmer of the feet of God,
Grass on the mountain-tops, or the early note
Of wild birds in the hush before the day,
Wherever sweetly in the ends of the earth
Are fragments of a peace that knows not man.'

F. W. H. Myers.

OCTOBER

A BRIGHT October day—the air is crisp and clear after a white frost at night, the sky deep blue, with masses of pearly white cumuli, broken into abruptly by other deep purple clouds.

A path winds through short grass that is golden yellow in the sunshine. On one side is a belt of wood, on the other open moorland, sloping upwards and crowned with beech-trees, whose now leafless branches melt into soft billowy masses of red-purple shadow in the middle distance, flecked here and there with touches of russet-orange colour, where some leaves yet linger, and glow with richest red as the sunlight touches them. Beyond them is a strip of far-distant moor, in colour a pure deep blue.

The path leads on into the shade of a grove of oaks, the green of whose foliage is scarcely touched by the hand of autumn, whose subtle presence they have, so far, boldly defied; only his breath upon

them is shown by a deeper, richer olive shade over the mass of foliage, against which the rugged stems stand out in pale rosy lights and gray shades.

The belt of wood on the left is almost bare of leaves, but the bracken, red-russet and brown, nestles lovingly round the feet of every tree-stem and twists in and out of the gray-lichened wood-paling that bounds it.

The heather blossom on the moorside has long been dead, but it still keeps a warm crimson hue, shaded at the roots into brown madder, at the foot of its tangled tufts.

But the chief objects to charm our sense of colour are two birches, one on each side of the path. That on the right is an old tree and rugged-stemmed; deep seams in the bark have almost obliterated its whiteness, until, where the stem rises to about ten or twelve feet from the ground, and where it is seen against the warm-toned moorland, the effect of the trunk is a cold gray-green; but where it shows against the clear blue and gray of the sky, and its branches divide and rise ever higher, they gleam in silvery whiteness and brilliancy, and intensify the gray-purple depths of the cumulus clouds and distant wood shadows.

BELOW PARK HILL, LOOKING TOWARDS
THE FARM. OCTOBER.

Not a leaf is left on this veteran birch, but its summit is crowned with a soft thin haze of red-brown twigs.

The other birch, to the left, is a young tree, and its one slender, erect stem shines silvery-white in the sunlight, as it tapers gradually upwards; a rounded mass of golden-yellow foliage hides the topmost twigs, while the lower branches are bare and plainly visible, of a warm red-madder colour, against the background of olive-gray oaks and their deep shadows.

The light of sunshine upon this golden-rich mass of colour is indescribably delightful to the eye, and forms the brilliant keynote to the whole picture, contrasted as it is against the blue-purple distance, the cerulean shade of the lower sky, or the pure cobalt blue above.

A branch of pale golden gorse is in full bloom beside the path, and its fresh scent, redolent of the spring, contrasts yet harmonizes with the rich mellow feeling of the autumn gold, glowing in October sunshine.

October sunshine, calm and still,
Rich autumn gold, is everywhere:
I pass along the woodland way
Where yellow birch and beech boughs flare.

The air is bright with mellowed gold,
But here, a straggler from the spring,
While sunshine gilds the golden woods,
Pale yellow gorse is blossoming.

Fresh odours, from a morn in May
To Memory tender greetings bring;
My eyes with autumn gold are filled,
My heart retains the gold of spring.

Beside the little stream that runs through the boggy valley, fringed on each side by its alder thicket, there is much of interest and variety to be found by the observer and lover of Nature at this season of mellowing leaf. Where a rough, sandy track leads down over the waste land on each side, amidst the tussocks of coarse, faded grass and bushes of bog-myrtle, to one of the little low bridges, there many wild fruit-bearing shrubs are clustered on the banks.

There is the blackthorn, its stiff, thorny branches thickly covered with lichen and studded with purple-bloomed sloes; the wild guelder-rose, whose slender stems can hardly hold up the heavy bunches of its fruit—those transparent, cornelian-coloured berries, drooping over their dark, finely-cut leaves.

The dogwood, with small black berries and red stems, is also here, and a tall hawthorn-bush, with

its dark crimson haws; but these have already been raided by the birds and squirrels, who leave the sloes severely alone, and no wonder! So only a few dried-up haws and empty skins are left to hang upon the tree. The wild briar-rose, tossing long slender shoots into the air, with short stems springing laterally from these, bearing, in groups of twos or threes, its orange-red hips, stands beside the wild crab-apple; whose thick, sturdy leaf-clusters, changing from green to yellow, and later on to vivid red, hide amongst them some pale yellow or green, bitter little crabs: and the wild cherry-tree is dropping crimson leaves into the water.

The leaves of most of the other bushes have yellowed and fallen by this time, and only a few stragglers still cling to their stems, so the berries are left distinctly visible. Most beautiful of all these wild berries is that borne by the 'spindle-tree,' or 'skewer-wood,' whose names tell of the value in which it was held in old days, on account of the closeness and hardness of the wood, for the making of spindles.

Its leaf is long and slender, and grows in a particularly effective way, each leaf distinct, and with gracefully-curved edges. The berry is of a quad-

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rangular shape, and in early autumn begins by changing from green to a dull pink, and then to pale rose-colour, becoming fuller in tint as the days pass towards winter; and sometimes its masses of rose-pink brighten the bare thickets until late in December, when it becomes 'the tree which in our winter woodlands looks a flower.' Each of the four fruit segments bursts open as it ripens, showing an orange-coloured seed within, making a curious contrast with the outer pink sheath; and on damp and chilly days most welcome and delightful is this bright spot of colour, gleaming out at intervals amongst the sober browns and grays of the leafless wood.

In some of the enclosures we find old yew-trees, making a dark shade, interspersed amongst the hollies; and their soft berries seem to be the especial love of the missel-thrushes, who may be observed poised on a swaying branch, with fluttering gray wings and speckled breast, swallowing down eagerly all the berries within reach, and warning off the blackbirds and other interlopers with their harsh guttural note.

In the garden, all the berries on the mountain-ash are cleared off by birds long before they have

fully ripened, and the arbutus fruit also disappears before we have had enough time to admire its spiked strawberry-like balls, shaded from yellow to crimson.

We planted a tree of the *Pyrus aria*, or white-beam, in one corner of the lawn, and the white undersides of its leaves, with their silvery stems, when blown by the wind, make a striking contrast to the deep rich green of the upper surface of the leaf. It bears a red berry, rather larger than that of the service-tree or of the mountain-ash ; and this is also a great favourite with the birds.

A most picturesque feature of this month of October in the Forest is the fern-cutting and carting. As soon as the bracken is dead and thoroughly dry, it is cut down with scythes and piled in heaps, until the carts come round to collect it, when it is used as bedding for cattle. But these operations are often sadly hindered (unless it is an exceptionally dry autumn) by the rains which usually fall abundantly at some time in the course of this month.

The heaps of fern will be dried and all ready for carting, when a day or two of heavy rain comes, turning the colour of the 'sere, damp fern' to a

deep rich russet, more pleasing to the eye of the painter than the farmer, who knows that it must again be spread out, and again dried, so far as may be, before it can be built up into its stack in the farmyard.

Just now we may meet many a Forest cart, its wheels sinking deep into the soft, peaty soil, and making larger ruts in the already deeply-scored tracks, moving slowly and with difficulty across the heath to gain the roads, with its burden of glowing, warm-tinted bracken.

This, too, is the ' pannage month ' (really covering six weeks, viz., the whole of October and the first fortnight in November), during which time most dwellers in the forest have the right of turning out their pigs to run loose where they will during the daytime, for they generally return to rest in the same spot for the night. This is a happy time indeed for many a huge black sow, followed by her train of ten, twelve, or even more, little glossy black piggies, the whole party snuffling, grunting, and squeaking, running races round their unwieldy parent as she waddles along, calling her offspring to her side whenever she comes upon an especially rich store of scattered beech-nuts, sweet chestnuts, or an oak

ON THE BEAULIEU ROAD.
A WET OCTOBER.

whose acorns are fine and well flavoured; and, while pigs may consume as many acorns in the day as they have a mind to, and only thrive and get fatter on them, the more they can eat, it seems hard that the poor cows and heifers, who equally love a similar diet, cannot so indulge with impunity, and have to be carefully guarded from access to too many acorns. Many a favourite heifer have we known to have died from the ill effects of a surfeit of acorns; and one may often see, in a field skirting the forest, where oak-trees let fall their ripened acorns and cups into the grass, women and girls gathering them up into baskets, or into their aprons, and this has to be done each morning, before the cows can with safety be turned into the field, so long as the plenteous supply of acorns lasts. Sometimes, by ill luck, the animals will break through a weak place in the fence, and, running loose amongst the trees, have a feast under the oaks before their escapade is found out; and then, very frequently, sickness and death follow their unlucky frolic.

The squirrels are especially active and lively just now, in this mid-autumn month, and in amongst the trees we can hear their tiny feet pattering about

over the already fallen leaves, busily feeding upon or collecting the treasure that is now to be found strewn broadcast upon the ground—the shiny, three-cornered beech-nuts, the acorns, the hazel-nuts; then scudding up the tree-trunks with a nut held firmly between the little sharp teeth, to be stowed away in the winter nest. I watched three squirrels playing together in the merriest way a few days ago. All of them were in splendid condition, with plump little white chests, and chestnut-red coats, and thick and plumy tails. Two of the trio were running up and across a huge beech-tree bole, dodging one another round and round it, and playing hide-and-seek delightfully, their little bodies and slender paws spread out flat against the broad surface of the mossy trunk. Then another squirrel appeared, coming with flying bounds along the lichened wooden fence beyond, and he, seeing the fun, also joined in the game, and the three little russet-clad darlings raced and chased one another round wildly, until one of them, seeming to be tired of play, ran higher up, and sat himself upright on a branch, with his tail curved up over his back, in the neat compact way in which only a squirrel *can* sit, and then produced a nut from

somewhere, and, holding it in his paws, began nibbling into the shell with the little sharp scratching sound that often arrests our ears in the silence of the woods, though often the source of it is hidden amongst thick leaves.

After their winter sleep, the squirrels often appear again, looking thin and weak, with tails scant of hair, and shabby coats, and limbs that seem stiff and feeble at first, until the fresh air and sunshine revives them.

They are short-lived creatures, their span of life not often prolonged beyond four or five years ; but it is a merry and bright one while it lasts, and one may watch their pretty, graceful movements, their quips and cranks, with never-failing pleasure, and always find some new beauty in their marvellously agile movements. I have noticed a squirrel this autumn, which came every morning to a large thorn-tree in the garden, and ran out to the extreme end of the slightest and most wavering branches, bearing them down with his weight while he feasted upon the abundance of crimson haws that covered the tree this year.

NOVEMBER

'The Forest calls me, is there no way back?
I have no place in what the world is grown.
Ah! let me breathe again the enchanted air,
And tread the ways that once my soul has known.'

ETHEL CLIFFORD: *Broceliande.*

THE BIRCHES AT FAIRCROP.
EARLY NOVEMBER.

NOVEMBER

The wet days of the last week in October have brought us to a sunny, still opening of November, when the white morning mists change, as the day advances, into the softest blue vapour amongst the trees, making a delicate background to the glory of the golden birches. A stretch of open moorland, still pink and brown with the faded heather flower, tempts us to follow an inviting track across it, part peat and part white sand, which leads into a fringe of birches edging a beechwood.

These older trees are almost bare now, though dark orange patches gleam here and there amongst their branches. But the graceful birches outside shine out in their fullest glory, some a mass of molten gold in the still sunshine, others of a redder, bright orange tint, and the gleam of the silver stem, with its green-gray markings, showing here and there. Some have already lost so much

of their foliage that the whole slender white stem is visible, with its dark lateral branches spreading out into a warm brown fan-shaped mass at the top, where they are crowned with a thin splashing of rosy orange leaves. As the sun of the 'brief November day' sinks lower, and the pink clouds gather round it, the warm golden colour of the birches grows richer and ever deeper, reflecting the sunset glow, until, as the last gleam of the red disc disappears behind the fir-trees to the west, it fades into mist and twilight.

It was in the November of 1899, that sad autumn when the war in South Africa began, and the troopships were being sent out each week from Southampton, and many of those we knew had gone in to bid good-bye to friends and relations belonging to the various regiments, as they embarked at the docks. And, on one of those calm, sunny days, which I spent in sketching beside a sandy track, bordered with dry heather, and with these glorious birches all round me, I could distinctly hear the distant sound of cheering from the crowds that were assembled at Southampton Docks (about ten miles away), as the ships bearing our soldiers to the war moved out of the harbour—

so clear was the air between, so still and windless the sky.

Then, sometimes, when this brilliant November pageant has been obscured by a day of rain and of colourless, neutral-tinted skies, or of thick fog, through which the dim woods gleam spectrally and unreal; and then, again, after this we have clear days of sunshine and glowing, unobscured colour over the woodland, what a return of delight it is, as Matthew Arnold expresses it, to

> 'See the sparkle on the eaves,
> And upon every giant bough
> Of those old oaks, whose wet red leaves
> Are jewelled with bright drops of rain.'

Later on, when we are well on in November, there is a brief time when a spirit of enchantment seems to hang over the Forest, and cast a dreamy glamour upon it. The glorious masses of rich gold, shaded and deepened into orange, into which the beeches were transformed a month ago, have melted away, and in their place is left a soft haze of blue-gray, with here and there a darker stem standing out in relief; this gray deepens in the shadows to an exquisite purple, and in the distant rounded masses is softened into blue mist.

Here and there, against this delicate background, a silver birch stem stands out, with some stray touches of golden foliage still clinging to it; and the oaks—latest of all the trees to break into leaf in the spring—now hold out the longest against the cold hand of the robber Autumn.

While the beeches are in full glory of sunset tints, the oaks still remain green. This changes into an old-gold tint, thence into rich russet, which takes gradually a crimson shade, deepening as the leaves grow more scanty, until at last the effect is of a thin veil of rose-russet, with here and there dark-brown touches, where the gnarled branches of the trees become more and more visible from day to day. Soft masses of purple show beyond, where the tall beeches are utterly bare.

The air is still, and the mellow sunshine of 'St. Martin's summer,' has arrested for a brief space the advancing footsteps of the winter; and as the day grows late, and the November sunset throws its red reflection upon the waning woods, these touches of pure colour stand out with startling and entrancing clearness, and with the brilliancy of jewels—sapphire of distant woods, amethyst of mysterious forest depths, ruby and jacinth of the

LYNDHURST CHURCH, FROM THE CUT-WALK. NOVEMBER.

latest oak-leaves, and here and there a touch of pure scarlet, where a few straggling leaves still cling to a spray of wild crab rising above the alder thicket. As we pass down a Forest glade the warm chestnut-brown of the ground, where beech and oak leaves rustle beneath our feet, contrasts pleasantly with the cold, gray-green hue of the lichen-grown branches. But it is still only the taller trees which are completely bare, for the undergrowth of slight hazels, willow, and young beeches spread a delicate tracery of light twigs across the thicker stems, with here and there a light of purest gold, where many a broad hazel-leaf holds out bravely against the inevitable decay to which all these delicate and lovely colours must succumb ere long.

But while these last warm days of the year still linger with us, our eyes feast with delight on the rich, warm lines of soft tree masses, on pearly lights and soft dreamy blues over the far-off moor, on red fir-stems at sunset, on bright reflections of reeds and sedges in the swampy pools, where the mist lies like a thick cloud at evening.

Only for a few days may we hope that this 'Indian summer' will stay with us, and the cold

winds forget to blow. One morning, when we first look out, the sky will be leaden-gray, the air dark and gloomy, the distance blotted out, and a dreary north-east wind will have laid its ruthless hand upon the last of our cherished bits of colour, and hidden the sun from us for days, giving us nothing in return but a leaden sky and earth, and bitter blasts that make us shrink from going out to face them.

DECEMBER

'Ye have been fresh and green,
Ye have been filled with flowers;
And ye the walks have been
Where maids have spent their hours.'

HERRICK: *To Meadows.*

CART TRACK OVER THE MOOR.
LATE NOVEMBER.

DECEMBER

The last golden days of mid-November are often succeeded by boisterous winds that blow away the last of the leaves from the oak and hazel branches, and whirl them round and round and high up in eddies, where gusts of wind cut their way through the open Forest glades, and over the fields the rooks circle in large flocks, dashing here and there, as if they enjoyed the buffetings of the wild gale.

The gray clouds become heavier and more lowering, and at last, when the gale has spent itself, a day or two of sheets of rain follow, soaking the low-lying, boggy tracts, making the little streams overflow their banks, and the paths, where dead leaves lie thickly, slippery with mud.

But the open gravel road across the moor is dry in an hour or two, after the violence of the rain is over, and, passing along it, we can watch the little rills running clear over beds of white sand,

and from the furrows and old cart-tracks cut in the gray, peaty soil.

There is a pleasant aromatic scent in the air, rising from the damp heather tufts and soaking green moss. But anywhere off these roads all getting about on foot is impossible, except in the thickest of boots, for water is standing everywhere, in the fields, the Forest rides, the heather slopes, both on high as on low-lying ground, and the earth is so completely sodden that it can absorb no more moisture, and where the soil is of clay it becomes a sticky, slippery mud.

But with the beginning of December, and often before that, we may expect the first white frosts. Then, on looking out in the morning, instead of the leaden, rainy skies, we see a thick white fog, and all the grass white with crystal stars. Later, after an hour or two, as the sun melts the fog away, we see a clear blue sky, all the sullen clouds vanished, and the tall fir-trees standing motionless, glad to rest after their long tussle with the gale.

The mist hangs all day between us and the distant trees, and as it thickens at evening, when the sunshine wanes, and the air grows sharp and chill, the feeling of these, the first of the keen, cold

winter days, is pleasant and bracing. After the white frosts comes a real, genuine frost, and if it lasts till after Christmas, and no snow falls, we may be happy indeed! Now the boggy ground on the hillside that slopes down from the beech-wood, where water has been standing so long, is frozen hard, and looks like a white cascade falling down the hill; and the springy tufts of moss, where bushes of heather grow, also frozen into a compact lump, make dry and firm footholds for walking.

Higher up, the rough cart-track winds in and out amongst the gray beech trunks, and its deeply-worn ruts are filled in with a white crust of ice. In these winter months, when all their leaves are gone, the grand, majestic growth of the beech-trees and oaks can only now be fully seen, so that of beautiful form in the wintry Forest there is, indeed, no lack, or of colour either, in spite of the fact that there is not a flower to be seen.

For the pale red-brown carpet of dead leaves and bracken covers the ground beneath the bare branches, until flowers begin to break through it again; and the rich olive-green moss creeps high up and all over the roots of the beeches, and lichen

of delicate hues of gray-green and blue-gray clothes the outstretched, rugged arms of the oak.

In looking at an old oak, one is often reminded of a remark made by one of the characters in a book by Mrs. Ewing, 'An oak-tree is all elbows,' and this exactly describes the growth of many of its branches, with their curiously sharp angles.

On one of these still, frosty days of early December, when the ground was hard and crisp and the air exhilarating, I went out to try whether the brief winter afternoon would give me time and light enough to make a sketch. Passing through the beech-wood, and then along a track which skirted the trees at the edge of the moor, I reached a point where some very high beeches looked down across a marshy swamp, in and around which grew beds of rushes, changed now to their winter tints of red and orange, and reflected in the glassy pools, whose stillness was disturbed now and then by a moorhen as it crossed the water, two dark lines in its track ever widening out behind it as it breasted the water. The splash of other waterhens from the bank, the cry of the wild duck as they sprang from the water and flew swiftly in a long chain towards the sunset, came up to me distinct and clear

FROM DENNY WOOD, LOOKING TOWARDS
WOOD FIDLEY.
DECEMBER AFTERNOON.

through the frosty air, as I sat on a fallen beech trunk on the edge of the wooded hill. Beyond the low, marshy ground was a belt of Scotch firs, blue with the cold mist rising from the swamp, and behind them rose the wood that I had visited in July, when the butterflies held high revel there, its crown of tall, slender beeches rising up high in the centre. This crown was now a mist of gray-brown branches and twigs against a pale-blue sky, overspread with golden haze.

The silence of the winter wood is broken now and then by the harsh but cheerful cry of the jay, as he flies slowly out from amongst the beeches across the open space. Seen against a dark background, the soft varied colour of his plumage, the red-pink and warm gray shades, the patch of white across his tail, and rare touch of pure blue on his wings, tell out handsomely. He is one of the few birds who lets his voice be heard at this dead, still time of the year; the flap of the wood-pigeon's wing is heard, but not his cooing note, and the woodpecker seldom utters his wild laugh in the winter. Of the blackbird's reiterated 'chuck-chuck' we have, indeed, more than enough sometimes; and, later in the afternoon, when the sky begins to gleam with

orange light through the bare branches, we hear the cock pheasant crow and flap his wings, as he flies up into a tree to roost.

With this picture before me of English winter woodland, the keen, misty air and frostbound landscape, the voice of the jay brings back to my mind the memory of a far other scene, though of almost exactly the same season—the middle of December, a year ago—but how different the environment!

It is in the deserted city of Futtehpore Sikri, among the marvellous red sandstone palaces raised by Akbar, the Great Mogul. The blazing Indian sun at mid-day made the red walls intensely hot and dazzling, but in one corner of the palace quadrangle, under arches carved with exquisite designs in the rich-tinted stone, was welcome shade and coolness to be found, and shelter from the fierce rays of the sun. Hence we could look across to a wondrous five-storied building of Akbar, each open story rising on slender pillars, and the highest crowned with a graceful pagoda roof. The air twinkled with heat and absolute dryness; and here, as though to complete the harmony of pure colour, the golden sunshine and red carven walls,

an Indian roller—the same bird as our jay in shape and movements, but how indescribably more beautiful !—flitted about quite close to us, as we sat and watched it.

Sometimes on the roof of the quadrangle, or up on to the highest point of the pagoda, then again on the sand at our feet, and thence to the edge of the fountain, as he hawked after a large yellow kind of bee, or hornet, he displayed his plumage to perfection, all of the intensest blue. Here, it is the pale blue, just tinged with green, of the turquoise ; there, the deep exquisite shade of the lapus lazuli, or the gentian ; and the sheen of his iridescent wings, as he darted across the sunlit space, produced a vivid effect as of jewels, not soon to be forgotten.

But the orange light is dying out of the western sky, and dark fir-trees and brown, leafless beeches are all taking the same misty twilight hue, as the air becomes intensely cold, promising a sharp frost to-night. The light is gone, and it is high time to start on the walk homewards, not the least of the pleasures of the day, bringing with it, as it does, warmth and a healthful feeling from the pure Forest air and quick exercise.

Even on Christmas Eve, while these sunny, frosty days still continue, it was possible to sit for an hour to sketch, in a dry, sheltered nook at the corner of a wood, under the old lichen-covered paling on the bank, and looking down a valley.

Birches grow in an especially beautiful manner here. On the open tracts of grass that are called 'lawns' in the Forest, and that run between an enclosed wood on one side, and perhaps a hillside, heather-grown, on the other, we see clumps of birches, grouping themselves together with infinite grace and lovely curves as the branches taper upwards. And if we examine closely the stem of a birch, which looks all creamy-white at a distance, how many delicate and pure shades of colour shall we not find in it! There is soft rose-colour, and a bluish emerald green, and orange-red where a bit of silver bark has peeled off, and warm brown where the branches start from the stem, with touches of green and black moss, and many gradations of blue-gray or red-gray on the shaded side; and all these tints veiled, as it were, and softened by the prevailing silver-white that stands out so distinctly to catch the sunshine.

Sometimes these groups of birches stand as

LOOKING DOWN BUTTS LAWN.
CHRISTMAS EVE.

sentinels on the outskirts of an old wood, some, as it were, stepping forward, others standing back. And there, in April, their radiantly green buds are the first sign of the coming of summer leafage. The faded hue of September leaves changes to pale gold, and at last to that rich, deep golden tint that so delights the eye in mid-November—a veritable frame of gold to the brown, leafless woodland within.

Now, in December, their topmost twigs make a tracery of warm crimson-brown (where next year's buds are already beginning to fill out) against the dim gray-brown masses beyond, and the thick, sturdy bushes of holly form a dark-green background to the silver stems. It is this prevalent growth of holly which gives so much warmth and variety to the wintry forest. It clothes the underwoods and redeems them from bareness, and its deep shadows enhance the brilliancy of the damp red fern, and the effect of the rugged lichen-grown trunk of the ancient oaks.

And, in a year when there is an abundance of all kinds of wild fruits, how rich in colour are the close-growing clusters of berries that cover the higher shoots of the holly-trees, in large, telling

masses of polished, deep vermilion, placed just below the last bunch of prickly leaves that always grow at the end of the branch. All through this month great boughs, and whole tops of trees even, when they are well covered with berry, are cut by the woodmen and sent up to London for Christmas-tide; and coming through the deep-rutted cart-tracks and on the open roads we meet the rough, indigenous Forest cart, with its low sides and wide-set wheels, piled high with glistening leaves and scarlet berries, and drawn, as often as not, by a white or gray angular Forest pony, with long ragged mane and tail, the whole group forming a cheerful wintry feature in the landscape.

But now the year is waning to its end, and our last thoughts and glances at the Forest, dwelling on the brightness of holly-leaf and berry, lead us on naturally to the joyous days of Christmastide, when the long trails of ivy, unwound from the tree-stems to which they cling, are carried indoors and wreathed around the frames of old pictures, and along the panelling of carved oak in ancient halls, together with glistening holly-leaves and scarlet berries, and twined in and out on staircase and gallery, brown polished oak, leaf, and berry alike

reflecting the glow of warm logs blazing on the open hearth. And, somehow, Christmas in the Forest brings to mind this scrap of an old English carol:

'Oh, the rising of the sunne,
The running of the deere,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweete singing in the quire.'

L'ENVOY

L'ENVOY

I LOVED you not, wild woods, when first I came
To dwell among you—giant forms were there
Of oak and beech, outstretching stalwart arms,
And deep beneath their boughs the shadows lay.
Wide-stretching moorland, boundless and remote,
And wind-swept heights, where pines rocked in the gale,
Which roared wild music through the soughing trees.
My heart went back to childhood's pleasant land,
The ordered growth of meadows, hedge-enclosed,
Green with fair pasture, white with fairer flowers,
The hawthorn, daisy, and the lady's smock;
Spangled with gold of sweetest cowslip blooms;
The paths across the fields and by the stile.
Oh, joy! the beds of fragrant violets, white
And purple, which we found beneath the leaves,
While spring's soft air was laden with their scent.
The hedgerow elms beside the grassy lane,

Whose roots made hollows for the nestling lambs,
And all the hedges thick with leaf and fruit.
Lush bramble sprays, with berries purple-ripe,
Barberries' coral, rosy spindle-trees,
Each in their seasons. Under July suns
We loved your tranquil flow by rushy beds,
Dear Midland river! 'neath your ancient bridge
With gray stone arches mirrored in the stream,
You seemed to dream through long, hot afternoons
In slumberous calm, while twisted willows threw
Their hollow trunks and trailing leafy sprays
Towards the bank; and at its margin grew,
Of clearest turquoise, blue forget-me-nots—
Ah! never have I found their match again,
So large, so blue, so dewy-fresh and fair—
The quaint white flower, with arrow-headed leaves
Pink ragged-robin, and the crested sedge;
Gold flower-de-luce grew tall from sheathèd stem,
And flowering rush, like faded rose in hue,
Glinted amid the gray-green beds of reed.
And there were cornfields, gay with poppy-flower,
And white, and blue, bright blossoms 'mid the gold;
And harvest days, when rich o'er all the land

Stood golden sheaves, and gleaners' songs were heard.
This gentle ordered landscape pleased me once:
But growing knowledge of your changing face
And varying moods, wild Forest, made me thrall
To your fresh beauty, ever-growing charm.
Here are cool mossy glades, whose leafy shade
Tempt wandering feet in summer heat to tread.
Here rippling brooks, that wind their own sweet way
Through sandy banks, where ancient beeches spread
Their strong gray arms across the stream, and shed
Their red leaves thick in autumn on its breast.
Fair birches, silver-stemmed, lean each to each
In tender groups, rising from beds of fern,
And heather spreads its crimson carpet deep
Where Springtide blaze of yellow gorse has been.
The scented pine-woods, where swift-footed deer
Seek covert, hold a new and mystic charm
Of undiscovered depths. Oaks, century-old,
Raise lichened arms and straggling branches far
Upwards to seek the sunshine. Ever haunt
These safe retreats the laughing woodpecker
The turtle-dove, with tender, purring note,

And on the flowering bushes, in the sun,
Hover or flit the bright-winged butterflies.
Yes, here my heart is now, fair Southern land,
And your wild nature all my fancy fills.

THE END

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